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Seventy-third year

Provisional

8411th meeting
Thursday, 29 November 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Ms. Samson
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1041)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1041)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1041, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

I now give the floor to Ms. Ghelani.

Ms. Ghelani: I provide this update today on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

I would like to start with the situation in north-western Syria, where there have been reports of mortars — including some shells reportedly containing chlorine gas — hitting three densely populated neighbourhoods in western Aleppo city: Nile Street, Al-Khalidiyah and Al-Zahraa. People with respiratory symptoms were rushed to the two main hospitals in the area. The World Health Organization has provided support to both hospitals and stands ready to provide further public health support, as required. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed, any confirmed use of chemical weapons is abhorrent and a clear violation of international law.

We have also received reports of air strikes in Idlib governorate on 24 and 25 November — the first such air strikes in more than two months. Those latest developments demonstrate the fragility of the situation and the urgent need for the sustained engagement of all sides to preserve the gains of the agreement that was reached between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on 17 September. The stakes remain high, as the alternative is humanitarian suffering on a scale that would devastate a population of some 3 million people in north-western Syria, who have known nothing but war and suffering in recent years.

In Rukban, between 3 and 8 November, the United Nations, together with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, was finally able to reach some 50,000 people — three-quarters of them women and children. That aid operation, approved by the Government of Syria and facilitated by the Russian Federation and the United States, was the first major delivery of material assistance to the people of Rukban since January, and the first time that aid has been delivered from within Syria. Our teams also vaccinated more than 5,000 children, together with officials from the Syrian Ministry of Health.

Colleagues returned shocked by what they had seen on the ground, reporting grave protection issues, increasing food insecurity and no certified medical doctors among the stranded population. Given the gravity of the situation, the Secretary-General has called for the deployment of a further convoy to the area as a matter of priority. Without sustained access, the situation of tens of thousands of Syrians, stranded in the harshest desert conditions, will only further deteriorate as the winter cold sets in.

Most people inside the makeshift settlement have stated a desire to return to their homes, but many are terrified of what the future may hold for them, whether it is in Government areas or locations held by non-State armed groups. A durable solution that is safe, voluntary and dignified — one that adequately addresses protection concerns — is urgently needed for the population in Rukban.

We are seriously concerned about the increasing number of reports of civilian casualties due to air strikes and ground fighting in south-eastern Deir ez-Zor governorate. Many civilians are reported among the dead and injured. Some 6,000 have been displaced from the Hajin enclave, controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, since October, with an estimated 10,000 people remaining within the enclave. Most are unable to access assistance and face severe protection risks. Of those who have been displaced, many live in

dire conditions in makeshift settlements, with some dangerously close to the front lines.

Despite considerable challenges in accessing areas of displacement due to insecurity and geographic isolation, local United Nations humanitarian partners have continued to provide assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Gharanij and Bahrah areas. That includes multisectoral assistance provided to 6,000 IDPs. We reiterate that under international law, the parties to the conflict must protect civilians against attacks, treat them humanely and allow and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief.

We are also deeply troubled by reports of restrictions in north-eastern Syria, where half of the some 100,000 children enrolled in Government-run schools are facing impediments to accessing their schools, especially in Qamishli and Al-Hasakah cities. An estimated 10,000 children have not been able to attend school at all since late September. Vehicles, including school buses and private cars, have been prevented from crossing checkpoints if they are carrying children going to schools that teach the nationally accredited curriculum.

Over the past weeks, the United Nations has been engaged in efforts with all concerned parties to advocate for children to be able to go safely to a school of their choosing. Across Syria, the conflict continues to have a devastating impact on children, including their access to education. An estimated 180,000 teachers are no longer in service. Some 40 per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed, and many others have been used to shelter displaced people. All Syrian children have a right to education without discrimination, and that right must be protected, respected and fulfilled.

Despite the very difficult conditions, the United Nations and its partners are committed to reaching all those in need, wherever they are. Over the past year, an average of almost 5.4 million people have been reached with humanitarian assistance each month through all possible avenues — from within Syria to areas under Government control, from within Syria across conflict lines, and from across the borders.

Cross-border aid remains a critical part of the United Nations response in Syria. This month alone, nearly 600,000 people in Syria have received United Nations food assistance delivered across the border with Turkey through the crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Hawa. Cross-border deliveries also included medicines, educational supplies and other non-food items for hundreds of thousands of people. Humanitarian organizations have just completed the vaccination of more than 12,500 children, aged between six months and 15 years, against measles and rubella in Idlib governorate, using supplies that had been delivered across the border. Thousands more benefited from education supplies and services, school rehabilitation and textbooks.

United Nations cross-border assistance is checked and verified by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic at designated border-crossing points. Every truck is checked to ensure that it contains only humanitarian supplies. Deliveries are confirmed by United Nations-contracted third-party monitors upon arrival at warehouses inside Syria, where they check the items being offloaded against the waybill. Then there is post-distribution monitoring again, including by independent third parties and through feedback received from affected communities. United Nations cross-border assistance is also subject to the normal accountability mechanisms between the donors and the delivery agencies, which also includes another verification system.

Currently, some 4.3 million people in need live in areas outside the control of the Government. That accounts for more than one-third of all people in need of assistance in Syria. It includes almost 3 million people in need in areas reached exclusively through cross-border operations. The United Nations does not have an alternative means of reaching those people, as access from within the country is impeded. It is for that reason that the Secretary-General has called for a renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) for an additional 12 months. The renewal of the resolution will continue to save lives. Millions of people depend on the Council's decision.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director of Operations and Advocacy Division in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for her valuable briefing, which confirms the continuation of the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. I would also like to pay tribute to all humanitarian and medical workers for their efforts in the field to alleviate the human suffering in Syria.

I deliver this statement on behalf of the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file, Sweden and Kuwait. I will focus on two points: the overall humanitarian situation in Syria and access to humanitarian aid.

With regard to the overall humanitarian situation, the Syrian crisis is entering its eighth winter. We must take a moment to review the humanitarian situation on the ground. The statistics of the United Nations confirm that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. There are 13 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, of whom more than 5 million are children. There are more than 5.6 million registered refugees in neighbouring countries, including 2.5 million children. More than 1 million people live in hard-to-reach areas. Behind those alarming numbers are countless stories of human suffering of Syrian civilians — children, women and elderly persons — who have become victim to one of the worst conflicts of our time.

The past few days and weeks witnessed a military escalation following a period of relative calm as a result of the Russian-Turkish agreement on Idlib. We reiterate our call on the Astana guarantors to ensure that the ceasefire in Idlib holds. The increase in military actions and hostilities — as we have seen in Aleppo, Hamah, Idlib and Deir ez-Zor — and reports of the use of chemicals again, this time in Aleppo, remind all of us of the fragility of the situation in Syria.

We renew our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, anywhere, at any time and by any party as it constitutes a violation of international law and relevant conventions. The use of chemical weapons in armed conflict constitutes a war crime, and we stress that those responsible for such crimes, whether they be individuals, entities, non-State actors or Governments, must be held accountable.

We also reaffirm that all parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure respect for it in all circumstances, including by protecting civilians and civilian targets. This year there have been over 130 attacks on hospitals and health-care facilities in Syria. We strongly condemn attacks against hospitals, as well as attacks targeting vital civilian facilities. We also call on all parties to respect international human rights law. There must be accountability for those who have committed serious violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We are concerned by the continued danger of explosives, mines and improvised explosive devices in a number of areas in Syria, which poses a threat to civilians and hinders the work of humanitarian actors.

With regard to access to humanitarian aid, there are still significant challenges for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1041). While we welcome the delivery of aid several weeks ago to Rukban Camp and the 50,000 people living there, after nearly 10 months since the last delivery, we stress the need for sustained and unhindered humanitarian access all across Syria, using all existing modalities, including cross-border, cross-line and humanitarian programmes. When it comes to the latter, we regret that no inter-agency humanitarian convoys were deployed in October and that the bimonthly inter-agency convoy plan for September and October was not approved by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. We still see a situation where more than 1 million people face a denial of access to humanitarian assistance, which should be provided based on human principles and needs.

Cross-border humanitarian assistance remains an indispensable lifeline to millions of people throughout Syria. It is a vital, important and complementary part of the humanitarian response in the country. The United Nations monitoring mechanism that monitors international humanitarian activities is robust and continuously strengthened.

We share the Secretary-General's assessment in his monthly report on the importance of the renewal of the provisions set out in resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions. They support the provision of assistance to those in need through the most direct routes — including across borders — especially as the United Nations does not have an alternative means of reaching people in need in those areas.

For the reasons I have mentioned here, and because the reality on the ground confirms that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be dire, Sweden and Kuwait, as co-penholders, intend to work to renew the resolution on humanitarian access, including the cross-border assistance modality. We will circulate the draft resolution soon and look forward to having the cooperation of all Council members in that regard. There is a critical humanitarian need for a renewal of the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014),

which represents the difference between life and death for many people in Syria. The Council must not fail those Syrians in need.

We stress the importance of ensuring a lasting ceasefire in Idlib, and indeed throughout Syria, in order to enable access for humanitarian assistance and for evacuating the injured, in accordance with international law and as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018). We welcome the fact that many people who had been detained by Government or opposition forces were released on 24 November. That is an important first step towards building confidence between the parties to the conflict.

Lastly, without a political solution to the conflict in Syria in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), the humanitarian situation there will continue to deteriorate. As the last month of the year is almost upon us, we emphasize that every effort must be made to reinvigorate the political process, including the establishment of a constitutional committee before the end of the year.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing and for the important work that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is doing to support the Syrian people.

We are grateful to the United Nations and the brave workers on the ground who delivered critical humanitarian aid on 3 November that included much-needed vaccinations for 5,193 children and also provided life-saving assistance to more than 50,000 internally displaced persons, most of them women and children. The United States worked for months with the United Nations and like-minded allies and partners to secure a Russian agreement to support the United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian assistance delivery. We also worked together to extract the necessary approvals from the Syrian regime to allow the United Nations to make its first humanitarian assistance delivery to the Rukban camp since January, and the first ever from Damascus.

The humanitarian needs in Rukban remain immediate and severe. A one-time aid delivery to Rukban is a good start, but it is certainly not enough. It is essential to provide United Nations humanitarian workers with sustained access to the camp. The United States has shown that it will do everything possible to facilitate aid to areas in Syria where we have influence, and we remain ready to provide security for any future deliveries of humanitarian aid through areas under the control of the global coalition to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. The Rukban aid delivery is clear evidence that Russia and the United States can work together to help the people of Syria and that the Russian Federation can secure the regime's approval for humanitarian deliveries. There is no conceivable reason for the Syrian regime to block future deliveries. We are willing to work with Russia to keep the arrangement going and we hope that the Russian authorities can work with Damascus to facilitate more of those deliveries in the future. We fully support the current United Nations plan to make another delivery to Rukban in mid-December, and we call on Russia and the Syrian regime to do their part to ensure that that happens without delay.

We must all continue to push for full, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access throughout Syria for the millions of people in need, including greater access for those in eastern Ghouta and south-western Syria. We urge Russia and Damascus to step up and get humanitarian aid to all the 13 million Syrians who need it. The Syrian regime has the opportunity to demonstrate its willingness and ability to facilitate aid deliveries throughout the territories it controls. But humanitarian access has not improved in communities that are firmly backed by the regime and under its control, in places such as eastern Ghouta, just outside Damascus. Why? Because the regime seeks to punish communities that are outside or were formerly outside its control for what they believe is a lack of loyalty to Al-Assad. That is wrong-headed.

An unwillingness to approve facilitation letters and other bureaucratic delays is essentially a denial of access, and it continues. As access to people in need across Syria continues to be severely constrained, the United Nations and its partners are providing life-saving aid to some 750,000 people every month through cross-border operations. There is currently no credible alternative for reaching those people. It is therefore absolutely imperative that the Council support the reauthorization of the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism provided for in resolution 2165 (2014). The United States strongly supports its renewal for an additional 12 months, as the Secretary-General has called for. We look forward to working with our colleagues on the Council to ensure that it is renewed.

Humanitarian conditions in Syria will continue to be dire in the absence of a credible United Nations-led process. The formation of a constitutional committee must move forward as quickly as possible. Despite the relative calm afforded to the people of Idlib in the past two months since the ceasefire agreement was reached between Turkey and Russia, Idlib's 3 million residents live in daily uncertainty. What is certain, however, is that any military escalation would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences for millions of civilians and for the stability and security of Syria's neighbours. We need only look at the events of the past weekend in Aleppo, where there are reports from the Syrian regime of an alleged chemical attack and Russian air strikes inside the Turkish-Russian demilitarized zone. We can all see how fragile the situation is and that millions of Syrian lives are at stake.

Russia committed to a lasting ceasefire in Idlib in the Istanbul summit communiqué of 27 October. To date, that ceasefire has resulted in very substantial reductions in violence. It is absolutely essential to ensure that the Syrian regime does not seize on false pretexts to undermine the ceasefire and launch a military offensive in Idlib, which would not only lead to a resumption of violence but would seriously jeopardize the prospects for a political solution to the conflict. We continue to engage with the Russian Government and military at senior levels to make it clear that an offensive in Idlib would represent a reckless escalation of the conflict and would put millions of civilians in danger.

The instability for many civilians in Idlib is palpable. Just last week, two of Syria's most prominent peaceful resistance activists, Mr. Raed Fares and Mr. Hamoud Jneed, were assassinated there. I would like to express our condolences to the families and friends of Mr. Fares and Mr. Jneed on behalf of my Government. Their selfless dedication to amplifying the voices of the Syrian people and their desire for peace, justice and dignity were sources of inspiration for so many. The Syrian people have been silenced for too long, and the prospect of a constitutional committee represents an important opportunity to move the political process forward in order to finally end the conflict. We ask the Syrian regime to take this opportunity and to make the move towards peace and stability in its country and region.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing.

As the Council is aware, the capital of Kazakhstan just hosted the eleventh international meeting in the framework of the Astana process, in which the issues of progress on a political settlement based on the groundwork laid in Geneva and Sochi, further improvements in the situation on the ground and the development of confidence-building measures among the Syrian parties were discussed. We thank our partners in Kazakhstan for their unwavering hospitality. As a result of the meeting, a joint statement was agreed on in which, having emphasized their determination to strengthen their trilateral cooperation, the guarantor countries among other things repudiated all attempts to create new realities on the ground on the pretext of combating terrorism, and expressed their determination to counter any separatist plans designed to undermine Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity or the national security of its neighbours.

Iran, Russia and Turkey welcomed the success on 24 November of the pilot project to exchange people who had been forcibly detained, which was a step forward in the work of building trust among the Syrian stakeholders.

On the whole, the situation in much of Syria is stable. While problems remain, there is clear evidence that things on the humanitarian front are improving, which is particularly noticeable in the areas controlled by Damascus. It is perhaps premature to take stock of outcomes for the year, but we believe that it is a major achievement that the so-called besieged areas have completely dropped off our agenda, for instance. However, the growing number of violations of the cessation of hostilities regime in the Idlib de-escalation zone is worrying. There was a particularly alarming incident last week when militants based inside the zone fired shells containing toxic substances on resident neighbourhoods in Aleppo, as has already been mentioned today. There are casualties. We hope that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons will undertake the necessary measures in connection with the reports from Damascus as soon as possible. Prior to that, there was an attack in the area of Jurin by militants from Haras Al-Din, an illegal armed group affiliated with Al-Qaida, in the repelling of which 18 soldiers were killed.

The Astana guarantor countries will ramp up their efforts to ensure that the cessation of hostilities is maintained and affirm their willingness to fully implement the 17 September memorandum on the

stabilization of the situation in Idlib. But it is important to understand that however significant a sustainable ceasefire is, it does not eliminate the need to continue working effectively to combat terrorism. The flow of refugees and internally displaced persons returning to their homes is gaining strength, with an average of up to 1,000 people returning from Lebanon and Jordan every day. To the extent that they can, the Syrian authorities are making significant efforts to create favourable conditions for their citizens. Helpful adjustments are being made at the legislative level.

As we have repeatedly stressed, at this critical juncture it falls to the international community to collectively get behind the Syrian people in order to repair the devastation as soon as possible and establish normal life for those who have voluntarily decided to return to their homeland. The guarantor countries of the Astana process have urged the international community, especially the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, to increase assistance to Syria, including by expanding humanitarian deliveries and rebuilding civilian infrastructure. Meanwhile, however, we are obliged to assume that some Western capitals have not grasped this and have made assistance in the restoration conditional on political circumstances, which is an inhumane approach. Sometimes they are also intimidating others who might dare to circumvent illegal unilateral sanctions, for example, and that is also unacceptable.

Following the eradication of the terrorist presence in the southern suburbs of Damascus, the Syrian authorities have been developing a plan to restore the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk, and the streets there are currently being cleared. We assume that the foreign donors who are traditionally sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians might participate in implementing those plans.

The situation in the health-care sector remains very serious. According to the response plan for Syria in 2019 prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) country office, humanitarian medical assistance is still needed, especially in newly liberated areas. More than half of the country's medical facilities are closed or functioning only partially. There is an acute shortage of medicines for treating common diseases, owing to disruptions in the supply chain. A third of the population is using water from unreliable sources. Over the past year all of these factors have led to outbreaks of measles, leishmaniasis and diarrhoea. It is important for WHO to focus on restoring the local authorities' capacity to provide medical care. We continue to highlight the inadmissibility of maintaining unilateral sanctions against Syria, which significantly limit the ability of the authorities to obtain medicines and medical equipment.

Unfortunately, many questions remain about the activities of the so-called coalition led by the United States, which is present on Syrian soil in violation of the basic principles of international law. We are deeply concerned about the continued build-up of the United States military presence on the left bank of the Euphrates. According to the media, the total number of United States military bases in Syria has already reached 19. The speed of its occupation and consolidation of quasi-State structures on the ground is growing, complicating the prospects for a political settlement.

The military operation in the area of Hajin in Deir ez-Zor governorate, which was announced as being against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has done no significant damage to the terrorists. Instead, as we have heard, including from Ms. Ghelani, time and time again its victims are civilians, and that is ever more difficult to deny. The Syrians have been sending desperate letters to the Security Council but for some reason they seem to resonate very little with the international community, just as we have seen no reaction to the discovery of mass graves of victims of the coalition's air strikes in Raqqa. Incidentally, the discrepancies in the statistics jump out at one. The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1041) speaks of 1,000 bodies exhumed, while according to the letter from Syria to the members of the Security Council the figure is four times larger. According to some reports, the United States refuses to consider the possibility of paying compensation for those killed in Raqqa. Against that backdrop, we are genuinely shocked by the details that have time and time again come to light of some Western capitals' support for Syrian opposition armed groups, including the transfer of arms and other material means to terrorists, while the public has been kept in the dark or deliberately misled.

In our view, those with influence over the armed groups controlling certain areas in north-eastern Syria should convince their clients to address the situation in which schoolchildren are not being given access to educational institutions in Government-held areas, which we also heard about in Ms. Ghelani's briefing and which can only be described as barbaric. In Damascus,

by the way, they are doing everything possible to ensure uninterrupted schooling throughout Syria.

In general, it should be acknowledged that the self-proclaimed local councils, which have the support of external allies, have from time to time been implementing discriminatory policies in the country's north-eastern areas that are changing the historical composition of the population.

The situation in the Rukban camp remains very unfortunate. The humanitarian operation launched at the beginning of November was inadequate from an organizational standpoint. United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent personnel were not allowed inside the 55-kilometre zone occupied by the United States around the Al-Tanf base. Militants from the Maghawir Al-Thawra armed group organized the distribution of aid. Without the necessary oversight, a significant portion of the humanitarian assistance failed to reach those who needed it. Many could not get inoculated because the vaccinations were being administered at a distance from the camp. Considering such gross errors, it would be difficult to expect that the Syrian Government, which has no authority in the area of the camp, to give instant permission for a new humanitarian convoy to come in. It is the United States, which is fully responsible for the plight of the civilians in the area, that should ensure the security of humanitarian operations in Rukban, not shift the fulfilment of the job onto illegal armed groups.

It is important to ensure that United Nations humanitarian personnel are involved in the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid, with the assistance of reputable organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. We urge that the possibility of organizing a permanent humanitarian corridor to Rukban be considered. The bigger picture should focus on gradually dismantling the camp and resettling its residents. We are ready to continue consultations with the United Nations, the Government of Syria and our United States and Jordanian colleagues. However, the only real way to solve the problem is by ending the occupation around the Al-Tanf base, not through one-off humanitarian initiatives. Incidentally, one of the ISIL terrorists taken hostage during a special operation to liberate Druze prisoners on the Al-Safa plateau in eastern Suwayda testified that he and his accomplices had received weapons, munitions and food from the area around the Al-Tanf base. It would be a good idea to properly investigate what exactly is going on in that grey area.

One extremely worrying fact is this year's record low wheat harvest in Syria, the worst in 30 years, which is partly due to drought. In that regard, the United Nations specialized agencies should help to support the country's food security, including by re-establishing its stores of vital cereal grains.

There is continuing major uncertainty with regard to cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance to Syria under the interim mechanism introduced by Council resolution 2165 (2014). Despite the persistent assertions about its transparency, there is absolutely no sign of it. Inside Syria, everything is farmed out to various so-called third parties and partners, who for some reason are reluctant to be identified to the Council. There is evidence that part of the humanitarian aid coming from outside is being confiscated and stored by Jabhat Al-Nusra and its satellites in Idlib. Armed groups are extorting at checkpoints along the line of demarcation, and local authorities, escorted by terrorists, are extracting tribute from farmers and businesses.

The Secretary-General's report briefly touches on the problem in a reference to abuses at the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. However, the description does not convey the scale of the manipulations, with Al-Nusra's participation. The data shows that in 2015 and 2016, the forces controlling that border crossing from the Syrian side were making $2 million a month. It is difficult to believe that no one in the United Nations was aware of the scale of these operations. The Secretary-General's survey of the situation has made none of it any clearer. The reality is that the situation on the ground in Syria has significantly changed, and that should be reflected in a comparable way in the adjustment of the cross-border mechanism.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of November, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of China to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives and their staffs, and to the Security Council Affairs Division for all the support they have given us. It has definitely been a busy month in which we have rallied to achieve consensus on several important issues within our

purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, including the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the interpreters, translators and verbatim reporters, and the security staff. As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire good luck for the month of December.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.